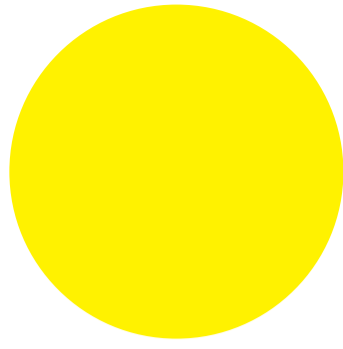


Iran targets tourism brand rebuild in postwar recovery plan



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Access to benefits of \$300b fund hinges on sweeping reforms

By Delaram Ahmadi
Staff writer

INTERVIEW
EXCLUSIVE

One of the provisions in the memorandum recently signed between Iran and the United States is the establishment of a \$300 billion fund with the participation of regional countries whose mechanism has yet to be finalized. In an interview with Iran Daily, economist Morteza Afqah examined the feasibility of such an investment in Iran.

He argues that in order to capitalize on this opportunity for the country's reconstruction and development, Iran must normalize its political and economic relations with the world while also undertaking fundamental reforms in its banking, customs, and bureaucratic systems. Without these pre-conditions, the funds would either be wasted, leaving Iran burdened with debt, or remain untapped altogether.

IRAN DAILY: What political, legal, and financial prerequisites are required for the establishment of a \$300 billion fund for Iran's reconstruction and economic development?

AFQAH: An investment of that magnitude is an enormous sum, roughly three times or even more than Iran's annual foreign-currency earnings in recent years. For such a figure to be utilized effectively and to genuinely drive the country's development and progress, Iran would need to undergo fundamental transformations on multiple fronts. For years, Iran's foreign relations have been hampered by restrictions on trade, and these challenges intensified after 2018 with the tightening of sanctions. As a result, substantial reforms are required across various sectors. First and foremost, Iran must normalize its political—and consequently economic—relations with all countries around the world, excluding Israel due to ideological considerations that make such normalization impossible. This is particularly important with Western countries and the United States, which, compared with many Eastern countries, possess relatively more advanced technology and expertise.

To achieve this, Iran's Foreign Ministry would need to become significantly more active in selecting and appointing personnel abroad. Ambassadors and diplomatic representatives should be chosen based on their expertise and thorough understanding of their host countries.

Domestically, the banking system is also in need of major reform. For years, Iranian banks have maintained weak links with the international financial system.

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Pezeshkian, Trump ink MoU to end war, reopen Hormuz

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The combo shows Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian (R) and his American counterpart Donald Trump holding copies of a memorandum of understanding they signed separately on June 17, 2026 to end the US-Israeli war on Iran.

WHITE HOUSE

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Pezeshkian, Trump ink MoU to end war, reopen Hormuz

International Desk

A memorandum of understanding (MoU) to end a recent aggression by the United States and Israel against Iran came into effect in the wee hours of Thursday after Iranian and American presidents separately signed the agreement brokered by Pakistan. Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian hailed the deal as a "historic document" and a demonstration of Iran's strength on the world stage. US President Donald Trump signed the agreement just before a grand dinner with French President Emmanuel Macron at the Palace of Versailles, the site of the signing of the eponymous treaty that formally ended World War One.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei on Thursday confirmed that the text of the MoU was finalized with the signatures of the presidents, saying, "Now it is time to test the implementation of the agreement." Iranian Parliament Speaker Baqer Qalibaf and US Vice President JD Vance were scheduled to attend a signing ceremony in Switzerland, but it was canceled as fighting flared in Lebanon.

"When the text is signed by the highest officials of the two countries, violating it will naturally have greater costs, and given our experiences, we preferred this to happen," Baqaei said.

However, he said that, "We are planning to hold a meeting in the coming days."

The agreement between Iran and the US was finalized on Sunday, following months of intensive negotiations mediated by Pakistan, with support from other regional countries. Under the agreement, the war and all military operations, including in Lebanon, have ended immediately, and the US naval blockade against Iran has been lifted.

The MoU also provides for the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz to commercial shipping. A 60-day verification and negotiation period will follow, during which the parties will address outstanding issues, including the lifting of all sanctions against Iran and Iran's nuclear program. Baqaei warned that implementing the ceasefire agreement with the US will be more difficult than signing it, stressing that Tehran has not forgotten the lessons of the war and will carefully monitor US compliance.

He made clear that Iran will not hesitate to respond if Washington fails to implement its obligations.

Iran's missiles

Baqaei explained that Iran's wise decision was to postpone nuclear negotiations to a later stage, focusing first on ending the war.

"From the moment the MoU comes into effect, which is now, we will have 60 days to



The combo shows Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian (l) and his American counterpart Donald Trump signing copies of a memorandum of understanding on June 18, 2026 to end the US-Israeli war on Iran.

negotiate on the nuclear issue and sanctions. If talks reach a conclusion earlier, that is better. But given the complexity of the issue, the 60-day timeframe is reasonable, and if necessary, it can be extended." He added that the MoU specifies that negotiations will only cover the nuclear issue and sanctions removal.

The Iranian official stressed that Iran's missile capabilities are not a subject for discussion.

Baqaei also emphasized that Iran has never abandoned its allies, and that a ceasefire in Lebanon was as important to Tehran as the end of the war on Iran.

Regarding Iran's enriched uranium, the Iranian official reiterated Tehran's red line on the issue.

"We have said from the beginning that enriched nuclear

material will not be transferred out of Iran. Dilution of enriched material is not a new option. It has now been introduced as an option to close the door on other possibilities," he said.

Management of Strait of Hormuz

The spokesman confirmed that Iran is finalizing a new management mechanism for the Strait of Hormuz which was closed by Iranian Armed Forces following the US-Israeli aggression against Iran on February 28.

"Iran will charge fees for services in the Strait of Hormuz. This mechanism and arrangements for managing the strait are being drafted. We began consultations with Oman long ago and have spoken with some other countries," Baqaei said.

Leader says approved Iran-US deal despite reservations

President: SNSC committed to defending national rights, Resistance Front



Ayatollah Seyyed Mojtaba Khamenei
IRNA

National Desk

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Mojtaba Khamenei said he had initially held a "different view" about the recent agreement reached between Iran and the United States to end war but authorized the agreement based on commitments made by president who has pledged to safeguard the rights of the Iranian nation and the Resistance Front.

In a message on Thursday, Ayatollah Khamenei said President Masoud Pezeshkian assured that he will not accept any excessive US demands.

"From this moment, we — meaning you, the proud nation, and this humble servant — will await the fulfillment of the stated conditions. But it is obvious that the in-person negotiations that will take place in the future will not mean accepting the enemy's view," the Leader said. Praising efforts made by the officials, Ayatollah Khamenei said Iranian officials have made extensive efforts out of compassion and goodwill to reach a memorandum of understanding with the US, while the American president has used various leverage points out of desperation.

"The passionate and loyal Iranian nation, as you have been informed, a memorandum of understanding was signed between the presidents of Iran and America," he said.

"In the course of reaching this stage, officials, out of compassion and goodwill, made many efforts, and of course it was the US president who, out of desperation, was using various leverage points for this purpose."

The MoU, signed remotely by Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian and US President Donald Trump, calls for a permanent end to hostilities across all fronts, the removal of the US naval blockade within 30 days, the restoration

of commercial traffic through the Strait of Hormuz, a reconstruction plan worth at least \$300 billion, and the lifting of US sanctions.

Under the MoU, the two sides have entered a 60-day negotiation period, with the goal of reaching a comprehensive final agreement. The agreement followed an unprovoked US-Israeli war of terrorism against Iran that began in late February.

Pezeshkian in a statement issued on Thursday warmly welcomed the Leader's message, describing it as a clear and decisive roadmap that defines the responsibilities of all state institutions in safeguarding Iran's national interests and dignity.

"As President of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Chairman of the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), along with the other members of the Council, we consider ourselves fully committed to paying maximum attention to the concerns of the Supreme Leader and to safeguarding the rights of the Iranian nation and the Axis of Resistance," president said in his statement.

Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf also said that Iranian officials will treat the directives of the Leader as their guiding light in upcoming negotiations, promising never to let the American-Zionist enemy undermine the rights of the Iranian nation and the Axis of Resistance.

Qalibaf said that the recent MoU is not the end of the road but merely the beginning of a difficult and complex struggle to fully secure Iran's legitimate rights from a "covenant-breaking" adversary.

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi warmly welcomed the "guiding message" from the Leader, emphasizing full commitment to his directives in defending the nation's dignity, independence, and revolutionary ideals.

Pezeshkian thanks Pakistan, Qatar for MoU roles; hails Tajik support

International Desk

The Iranian president expressed appreciation for the critical roles played by Pakistan and Qatar in achieving a peace agreement between Iran and the United States, also thanking Tajikistan for its supportive position toward Iran.

Masoud Pezeshkian in a phone call with Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, whose country mediated the peace talks between Tehran and Washington, expressed appreciation for Pakistan's "extremely critical role in steering the mediation process with great skill and sincerity," saying that Iran would "always remember Pakistan's positive and constructive ef-

forts and its support for Iran during these difficult times." Sharif, for his part, said the landmark deal would not only help restore peace in the region, but also go a long way in rebuilding the Iranian nation and further strengthening Pakistan-Iran ties.

He also wished the Iranian side success in the next phase of negotiations.

In a separate conversation with Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, the Iranian president also praised Qatar for its role in facilitating diplomatic efforts that led to the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Iran and the US.

Pezeshkian reaffirmed Iran's commitment to

strengthening political, economic, and cultural ties with neighboring and Islamic countries and expressed hope that the new atmosphere created by the MoU would deepen relations between Iran, Qatar, and other regional states.

Welcoming the MoU, Sheikh Tamim emphasized the importance of diplomacy and dialogue in reducing tensions and enhancing regional stability, adding that the current circumstances offer an opportunity to expand cooperation between the two countries.

Iranian president also held a phone conversation with Tajikistan's President Emomali Rahmon, during which Pezeshkian expressed appreciation for the sup-

portive, fraternal, and sympathetic position of the government and people of Tajikistan toward Iran.

Both sides welcomed the agreement and emphasized the importance of strengthening peace and stability across the region.

President Pezeshkian, referring to recent regional developments, expressed hope that greater unity among Islamic countries would help prevent destabilizing and aggressive policies in the region and pave the way for sustainable peace and security.

President Rahmon congratulated Iran on reaching the recent MoU with the US, describing it as a hopeful development for the peoples of the region.

Israel pummels Lebanon in disregard of Trump's Iran deal

Araghchi: Tel Aviv regime wants 'permanent war'

International Desk

Israel intensified its strikes on Lebanon on Friday despite an agreement between Iran and the United States, which includes halt to regime's attacks on the Arab country.

According to the Lebanese Health Ministry, Israeli airstrikes and bombardments killed at least 47 people and wounded 97 others in Lebanon on Friday. Later in the day, Israel and Lebanon's resistance group Hezbollah reportedly agreed to a ceasefire brokered by US and Qatari mediators following talks with Israel and Iran. However, Lebanese state media reported further Israeli airstrikes in violation of the ceasefire. Lebanese President Joseph Aoun condemned the latest Israeli strikes on his country, saying the "killing



and destruction constitutes a dangerous escalation."

"It effectively targets all ongoing efforts to consolidate the ceasefire and end the war," a statement from the presidency said. Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi also reacted to the developments in Lebanon, saying the regime was after a "permanent war" following remark from

its far-right national security minister Itamar Ben Gvir saying "all Lebanon must burn" after four Israeli soldiers were killed there.

"This is not a rant by a random genocidal lunatic. It's a public post by the national security minister of the Israeli regime. The genocidal death cult headquartered in Tel Aviv is a threat to all of humanity. It threatens all humans. Its only interest is permanent war," Araghchi said on X. Israeli attacks on Lebanon began in March after Hezbollah launched military operations against the regime in response to the regime's aggression against Iran.

The war has claimed at least 3,800 lives since March 2, according to the latest figures released by Lebanon's Health Ministry.



Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist

CARTOON



Tehran, Astana seal transit deals to boost East-West trade via joint hubs



Railway tracks lead into the dry port at Khorgos on the border between Kazakhstan and China.
● FOREIGN POLICY

during meeting between Pezeshkian and Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, in what the two sides described as a significant step toward expanding bilateral relations. Sadeq Malvajerd said greater cooperation in transit and transportation would be the key driver of higher bilateral trade, particularly through the movement of goods via Iran and Kazakhstan, noting that the two countries could serve as a strategic link between East and West. She said meetings were held with Kazakhstan's deputy prime minister as well as the ministers of economy, trade and integration, and transport, with all sides emphasizing the need to increase transit volumes and resolve existing rail and road freight transport bottlenecks.

China, cargo source; Iran, gateway to Europe

The minister said proposals discussed with Kazakhstan's transport minister envisioned China serving as the source of cargo shipped to Kazakhstan and onward to Iran, with Iran functioning as a gateway to Europe, Turkey

and the South Caucasus. She added that Kazakhstan's access to open waters through Iran's Chabahar port was also discussed and welcomed by the Kazakh side. She said the two countries also reached understandings on implementing the proposals and expanding rail and road transportation links between Iran and Kazakhstan, while stressing the importance of further strengthening transport connectivity.

Logistics hubs planned

Sadeq Malvajerd said another major focus of the visit was identifying locations for logistics hubs to store and redistribute goods along transit routes in both Kazakhstan and Iran.

She said that, following an earlier agreement to allocate land at Iran's southern Shahid Rajaei Port for Kazakh investment, the Iranian delegation also visited the Khorgos dry port on the China-Kazakhstan border.

"Based on the proposals presented and the positive response from Kazakhstan, domestic investors will review the outcomes of this trip so that logistics hubs can be established in Kazakhstan at the Khorgos dry port and Aktau port, and in Iran at Amirabad, Aprin, Chabahar and Bandar Abbas," she said. She said Kazakhstan's geographic position and its status as one of the world's major grain suppliers created strong prospects for

the development of such logistics hubs in Iran. She added that, given the climate challenges ahead, the understandings reached during the visit had moved closer to implementation.

"Under the agreement reached, the Kazakh side will be present at Shahid Rajaei Port in the shortest possible time, and the investor will take possession of the allocated land," she said.

Summarizing the visit, Sadeq Malvajerd said both the bilateral meetings and site visits would help strengthen relations and cooperation between Iran and Kazakhstan, producing tangible benefits for both countries. She added that discussions also covered expanding tourism cooperation, alongside trade, with Kazakhstan's economy, trade and transport ministers, saying increased travel by Iranian and Kazakh tourists would deepen cultural and civilizational ties while also supporting higher levels of commercial interaction.

Bilateral trade between Iran and Kazakhstan has remained relatively modest but has been on an upward trend. Trade turnover reached more than \$340 million in 2024, up about 12.3% from the previous year, while officials from both countries have set a long-term goal of increasing annual trade to \$3 billion, supported by expanded transport corridors and logistics cooperation.

Economy Desk

Iran and Kazakhstan have finalized agreements to expand transit cooperation and will soon activate logistics hubs at key ports in both countries to capitalize on Iran's role as a gateway for cargo moving from China to Europe and to provide Kazakhstan with access to open waters, Iran's roads minister said.

Speaking in an exclusive interview with IRNA after a recent visit to Kazakhstan on Thursday, Roads and Urban Development Minister Farzaneh Sadeq Malvajerd said the trip followed President Masoud Pezeshkian's visit to Kazakhstan last year and was aimed at implementing the agreements reached during that visit.

Last December, Iran and Kazakhstan signed 14 memoranda of understanding in Astana

Iran, Russia crafting new mechanisms to ease trade: CBI chief

Economy Desk

The head of the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) said on Friday that Tehran and Moscow are designing and strengthening new financial mechanisms aimed at facilitating bilateral trade, following a working visit to Russia.

Abdolnasser Hemmati, who held talks with Russian monetary officials and business leaders during a three-day trip to Moscow that began on Tuesday, said the focus was on creating financial channels independent of conventional restrictions and utilizing monetary capacities to immediately ease trade flows.

"The recent trip was not merely a diplomatic visit but an operational mission to remove bottlenecks in foreign trade," Hemmati was quoted as saying by ISNA.

"Our emphasis in meetings with Russian monetary authorities and economic activists was on establishing financial mechanisms independent of conventional restrictions and utilizing monetary capacities to immediately facilitate trade," he added. Hemmati said the central bank's approach during the visit was focused on reducing transaction costs for traders. "We are seeking integration and stability so that economic activists in Russia can engage in exports and imports with confidence in ex-



Abdolnasser Hemmati (2nd R), the head of the Central Bank of Iran (CBI), attends a meeting in the Russian capital of Moscow on June 18, 2026.
● Borna News

change rates and the ability to transfer funds," he stated.

The governor identified Russia's Mir Business Bank as a key implementing arm in the effort, saying he had stressed the need to increase its capital and operational capacity to better support the International North-South Transport Corridor and remove obstacles to opening letters of credit for Iranian traders.

He visited Russia's Mir Business Bank on Wednesday, calling for broader banking cooperation, increased financing capacity for bilateral trade and a stronger role for the bank in supporting the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC).

Hemmati also said on Friday that the activation of a permanent banking committee between the two countries was a strategic step to ensure continuous follow-up on agreements and prevent them from becoming bogged

down in administrative layers.

During a meeting with Russian Central Bank Governor Elvira Nabiullina, the two sides agreed to activate the permanent banking committee between the central banks of Iran and Russia to pursue and accelerate joint banking and financial programs, according to IRNA.

The monetary agreement between Iran and Russia took effect in January 2025, enabling the two countries to settle trade using their national currencies, the rial and the ruble, at agreed exchange rates in the commercial foreign exchange market.

In a related banking development, Russia's Mir card network was linked to Iran's SHETAB system in November 2024, and the first two phases of the joint payment system have already been completed. On Tuesday, Hemmati said the third phase of the bilateral agreement will be implemented within a maximum of two months.

Pakistan resumes land travel for merchants to Iran after one-year halt

Economy Desk

Pakistan has resumed land travel for its business community to Iran through the Taftan-Mirjaveh border crossing, allowing Pakistani merchants holding valid Iranian business visas to enter the neighboring country after a year-long suspension.

Pakistan's Dunya newspaper said that the country's Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), which oversees border control, passports and immigration, had authorized the facilitation of cross-border travel for traders through the Taftan crossing in the southwestern province of Balochistan, IRNA reported on Friday.

Pakistani media said the move would ease border trade and help expand commercial activity between the two neighboring countries.

Authorities said decisions regarding the resumption of travel for ordinary passengers would be made later, depending on the regional security situation.



The crossing for outbound travelers had been suspended since mid-June, last year, following the outbreak of the Israel-Iran conflict, although trade and customs operations continued.

In January 2025, Pakistan issued final approval for the opening of a fourth border crossing with Iran at Chadgi in Pakistan's Balochistan province and Kouhak in Iran's Sistan and Baluchestan province, aiming to facilitate bilateral trade, create jobs and curb smuggling.

Mirjaveh, Rimdan and Pishin are the three main border crossings linking Pakistan and Iran, corresponding to the Taftan, Gabd and Mand crossings on the Pakistani side, through which bilateral trade and passenger traffic are conducted.

Access to benefits ...

Following the FATF-related restrictions, Iran's financial connections became even more limited, leaving the banking sector ill-prepared to establish broad-based relations with the rest of the world. Therefore, the quality of banking services must be upgraded rapidly. This includes workforce training, financial interactions with foreign institutions, foreign-language proficiency, and access to modern technologies used in the international banking system. In addition, while many Iranian traders are experienced and have strong commercial track records, years of declining trade—particularly with European countries—mean that further training may be necessary. Such efforts would help merchants coordinate more effectively with domestic institutions and ministries involved in foreign trade, while also familiarizing them with the frameworks governing international commerce.

At the same time, the quality of services provided by Iran's customs administration must be improved. Customs offices are among the most important gateways for the movement of goods and services, yet they too require fundamental modern-

ization. Personnel need enhanced training, improved language skills, and greater familiarity with modern techniques and procedures. Iran's customs system, much like other administrative and executive structures, suffers from serious inefficiencies that have become major obstacles to development. In addition to streamlining processes and shortening service-delivery timelines, customs authorities must be upgraded both technologically and in terms of expertise.

Finally, fundamental reforms are required across the inefficient bureaucratic structures that exist throughout the country's institutions. Current bureaucratic systems must be overhauled, particularly within agencies and ministries involved in foreign trade and foreign investment. From the Central Bank and other banks to the Ministries of Industry, Mine and Trade, Economy and Finance, the Plan and Budget Organization, and the customs administration, all of these bodies need to streamline their bureaucratic structures, improve efficiency, train their personnel, and adopt modern technologies to facilitate international economic engagement.

What role will Arab countries play in this fund? Are they expected to transfer Iran's unfrozen assets into the fund, provide capital themselves, or participate in managing and overseeing investments?

As an economist, I have no detailed information available beyond what has been reported in the media. It should be emphasized, however, that if the prerequisites outlined earlier are met, not only Arab countries but nations across the world—especially Western countries whose trade relations with Iran have declined sharply over the years—would be highly interested in investing in Iran. Many of these countries are grappling with economic stagnation and are actively seeking destinations with strong investment potential. Under current circumstances, Iran could become an investment paradise due to years of sanctions, persistently low levels of investment, and the vast untapped capacities that exist throughout the economy. The damage caused by the recent war has further expanded both the need for investment and the opportunities available.

As a result, interest would not be limited to Arab states. Many Western countries,

including the United States, as well as Eastern economies such as Japan, South Korea, and Malaysia, all possess substantial capital and are constantly looking for promising investment destinations. If the necessary conditions are put in place, there will be competition among countries to invest in Iran.

Given that a significant portion of US primary and secondary sanctions against Iran remains in place, under what legal and executive mechanisms could American and non-American companies participate in projects financed by this fund?

The necessary and sufficient condition—and indeed the primary prerequisite—for Iran to benefit from international trade and economic cooperation, whether through foreign investment or trade in goods and services, is the absence of political and economic restrictions in its relations with the outside world.

In the short term, the first requirement for placing Iran on a path toward development is ending the long-standing state of "neither war nor peace." Relatively speaking, part of that objective has now been

achieved. However, the next essential step is the complete removal of sanctions affecting the country's economy and political relations. Third, Iran's regional and extra-regional tensions must be resolved, and normal political relations with all countries—particularly those in the region—must be restored.

There is therefore little doubt that, following the end of the war and any potential final agreement reached after the 60-day negotiation period, sanctions relief would have to be the next step.

Iran's political relations, particularly with Arab countries that were seriously affected by the conflict, must also return to normal. This is especially true in the case of the United Arab Emirates, a country on which Iran has long depended heavily for trade, both financially and through its ports.

Otherwise, even if a \$300 billion fund is established, without these prerequisites in place, the resources would either be dissipated without delivering meaningful results, leaving Iran indebted, or fail to be utilized at all. In either case, such a fund would fail to bring about meaningful structural change in Iran's economy.

EU's challenge in advancing unified policy toward China



By Morteza Makki

Expert on European affairs

OPINION

If, during previous decades, European leaders regarded the expansion of trade with China as an emblem of the success of globalization and economic interdependence, that very interdependence has now turned into a source of economic, industrial, and even security-related apprehensions. In fact, Europe is transitioning past a historical epoch; an epoch in which it was presumed that China's integration into the global economy would engender greater political and economic convergence, yet many European policymakers have now concluded that this assumption has not merely failed to materialize, but has, in certain domains, produced antithetical outcomes.

An analysis of economic trajectories demonstrates that Brussels's concerns do not emanate solely from the enlargement of the trade deficit with China, but are rooted in more profound transformations within the structure of the global economy. Throughout the past two decades, China succeeded in ascending from the status of the "world's factory" to the position of an advanced industrial and technological power. Initially, this transformation was regarded as a substantial opportunity for Europe because European corporations benefited from China's vast market, and European consumers likewise obtained access to inexpensive goods. Yet the very factors that were once perceived as advantages have now evolved into strategic concerns.

Today, numerous proprietors of European industries contend that competition with Chinese firms, in fields ranging from the steel industry to electric vehicles, solar panels, batteries, and even advanced technologies — which benefit from extensive support from the central governments — inexpensive access to capital, subsidized energy, and long-term industrial policies, has become progressively more difficult.

Studies published by think tanks such as Bruegel, European Policy Centre, European Union Institute for Security Studies, and Council on Foreign Relations indicate that Europe's principal concern is no longer merely trade, but rather the issue of "economic security," a concept that, following the COVID-19 pandemic, supply-chain disruptions, and the war in Ukraine, has become one of the principal watchwords of policymaking in Europe. European leaders, particularly after experiencing extensive dependence upon Russian gas, recognized that excessive reliance upon a single external power can, under crisis conditions, transform into a geopolitical vulnerability. The same concern is now being raised regarding China. Europe's dependence upon imports of rare mineral elements, critical raw materials, batteries, semiconductors, and numerous technologies required for the green transition has impelled Brussels to reassess its economic relations with Beijing.

This alteration in outlook has coincided with mounting concerns regarding China's excess production capacity. Numerous European economists maintain that China's slowing economic growth and structural economic issues have rendered Beijing more dependent upon exports than before. Consequently, an immense volume of Chinese goods enters global markets



● LISK FENG/THE NEW YORK TIMES

at highly competitive prices. From the European perspective, this trend has not only intensified the European Union's trade deficit, but has also weakened the competitive capabilities of many domestic industries. For this reason, Brussels has, in recent years, deployed an array of trade-defense instruments, ranging from the imposition of tariffs upon Chinese electric vehicles to intensified scrutiny of foreign investments, examinations of Chinese state subsidies, and the formulation of new regulations designed to support Europe's strategic industries. Nevertheless, Europe's principal challenge is that it cannot pursue the same trajectory adopted by the United States. Unlike Washington, Europe's

economy possesses considerably deeper ties with China. China is among the European Union's largest trading partners, and thousands of European companies derive a substantial portion of their revenues from the Chinese market. The German economy, in particular, which is regarded as Europe's industrial engine, remains dependent upon the Chinese market across numerous sectors. Major German automobile manufacturers benefited for years from the growth of the Chinese market and continue to conduct a significant share of their global sales within that country.

This dependence has resulted in the absence of complete consensus within the European Union regarding the appropriate manner of confronting China. France, Lithuania, and several other states advocate a more stringent approach and maintain that Europe must safeguard its strategic industries against unfair competition. Conversely, Germany and several Southern European countries are concerned



German Chancellor Friedrich Merz (L) takes part in a presentation of self-driving Mercedes vehicles alongside Ola Kallenius, chairman of the Board of Management of Mercedes-Benz Group AG, in Beijing, China, on February 26, 2026.

● VCG



Studies published by think tanks indicate that Europe's principal concern is no longer merely trade, but rather the issue of "economic security," a concept that, following the COVID-19 pandemic, supply-chain disruptions, and the war in Ukraine, has become one of the principal watchwords of policymaking in Europe. European leaders, particularly after experiencing extensive dependence upon Russian gas, recognized that excessive reliance upon a single external power can, under crisis conditions, transform into a geopolitical vulnerability.

that escalating tensions may provoke retaliatory measures from China and extinguish existing economic opportunities.

These divergences of perspective constitute one of the most significant impediments to the formation of a unified European policy toward Beijing. Indeed, unlike the United States, which possesses a more centralized decision-making structure, the European Union must establish equilibrium among the differing interests and priorities of its 27 member states, a circumstance that renders decision-making more intricate.

Under such conditions, the strategy selected by Brussels for managing relations with China is termed "de-risking". This concept, which has gradually become the principal pillar of Europe's China policy, represents an attempt to identify a median path between two extreme alternatives: the preservation of the extensive dependence of the past or complete economic separation. European leaders fully understand that a complete rupture with China is neither feasible nor desirable. The volume of trade between the two parties, the complexity of supply chains, and the mutual dependence of their economies render such a scenario extremely costly. From Brussels's perspective, the continuation of the status quo is likewise accompanied by escalating risks. Thus, Europe's objective is to diminish dependence within sensitive and strategic sectors, diversify supply chains, and enhance economic resilience, without calling the fundamental basis of economic relations with China into question. Yet this strategy confronts a significant obstacle: China's capacity to exert reciprocal pressure. During recent years, Beijing has demonstrated that it utilizes economic instruments as geopolitical leverage. Restrictions upon the export of rare mineral elements, controls over the export of certain strategic raw materials, and the utilization of access to the Chinese market as an instrument of pressure are examples of this capability.

Consequently, many European politicians are concerned that more stringent measures against China will be accompanied by reciprocal reactions from Beijing. This concern acquires greater significance under circumstances in which Europe's economy is confronted with challenges such as low growth, a crisis of industrial competitiveness, and pressures arising from the green transition. What is observable today in relations between China and the European Union is not merely a trade dispute; it is an indication of deeper transformations within the international economic order.

The model of globalization predicated upon economic efficiency, which emerged after the conclusion of the Cold War, is gradually yielding to a world in which geopolitical, security-related, and technological considerations exercise a more pronounced role. If, in the past, corporations made decisions principally on the basis of production costs and profitability, governments today are equally concerned with supply-chain security, economic resilience, and technological autonomy. For this reason, the future of relations between China and the European Union cannot be explained through the traditional concepts of cooperation or confrontation.

The reality is that the two parties require one another, while simultaneously harboring greater mistrust toward one another than in the past. Europe requires China's market, capital, and productive capacity, and China

likewise depends upon Europe's technology, investment, and consumer market. Yet alongside this interdependence, competition over advanced technologies, future industries, supply chains, and geopolitical influence is intensifying.

From this perspective, relations between Brussels and Beijing have entered a phase of "managed competition"; a phase in which neither a return to the economic optimism of previous decades appears probable nor the emergence of a full-scale economic

Cold War. What appears more probable is the formation of a new order governing relations between the two parties. An order in which trade and investment will continue, yet will be influenced, more than ever before, by security-related, industrial, and strate-

gic considerations. In essence, Europe has now concluded that the China question is no longer merely an economic issue, but has become one of the European Union's most consequential strategic tests in the 21st century; a test whose outcome will de-

termine not only the future of Europe-China relations, but also a portion of the future of the global economic order itself.

The article was first published in Persian by the Strategic Council for Foreign Relations.

European security strategy in search of new ambition



● CHRIS EICHBERGER/ECFR



By Pierre Vimont
Senior fellow at
Carnegie Europe

OPINION

The European Commission's recent decision to draft a new European Security Strategy has come as a surprise to many. And the desire to deliver it on a very tight timeline, in time for Commission President Ursula von der Leyen's State of the European Union address in September, a mere four years after the EU's Strategic Compass, is perplexing to some. But the union's strategic environment has experienced epochal shifts: Russia's grinding war in Ukraine, China's accelerated economic dominance and existential threat to many European industries, as well as the United States' transformation from most trusted ally to unreliable and sometimes coercive partner. Europe is therefore confronted with a new world order where hard power has become the name of the game. As a consequence, security concerns permeate all policies far beyond the military sector. They shape ongoing debates about eco-

nomics overdependence — from energy to digital applications or critical minerals — with the risk of being instrumentalized for political purposes.

Today, Europe cuts a hesitant figure on the international scene. It could become a lonely one if it fails to clarify what it represents, where it wants to go, and which partners it intends to work with. This is where the new security strategy can make a difference. In the end, this process should be about redefining the European identity as it confronts a massive set of issues rarely seen in its history.

From that point of view, Europe could go for an inward-looking approach or, conversely, choose to lead an alliance of like-minded countries dedicated to the reform of the multilateral order. Equally, it could simply focus on managing the present crises as best as it can or raise its game to a vision of what it wants to be in the long term. In that case, it must be capable of offering its own perspective for a future security order for the continent as a whole and take responsibility for leading the way with outside partners dedicated to the revival of an improved rules-based order.

Yet, instead of engaging at this level,

many member states fear that the commission may be using the new strategy to overstretch its sphere of action. Recent initiatives from Brussels, like encouraging joint procurements and more cooperation between defense industries, have raised concerns of a renewed attempt to redraw lines or responsibility in a sensitive political playground. The same concern applies to finances: With the ongoing discussions over multi-year budgetary planning, a new security strategy looks like the natural springboard to push for new external programs. As laborious negotiations try to balance member states' top priorities — agriculture and social spending — with finding new money for competitiveness, the future security strategy looks like an unwelcome intruder in an already strenuous power play.

There is also the question of how the new strategy would propose to deal with



European Council President Antonio Costa (l) and South Korean President Lee Jae Myung gesture on the day of an EU-South Korea summit in Brussels, Belgium, on June 10, 2026.

● YVES HERMAN/REUTERS



But the contents of a new security strategy would be far from consensus-based. Traditionally, strategies connect ends, means, and ways. In assessing its ambitions and priorities, Europe will have to analyze the increased complexity of contemporary threats. It must also define its own interests and unpack new instruments and working methods. In the past, EU strategies often resorted to a superficial analysis of the geopolitical environment, for fear of naming adversaries and describing the real nature of the threats Europe was confronting. Today, it boils down to a larger question about the role of Europe in these consequential times.

the current state of relations with the United States. Can the EU draw any definitive conclusion from the giant shifts still underway in the transatlantic relationship? Redesigning this partnership may rapidly become an impossible task, when most member states fear antagonizing US President Donald Trump and would rather buy time in the hopes of returning to a more orderly state of play. All that said, as a constant defender of right over might since its inception, it is logical for the union to feel the urge to set up a more positive vision for the global order.

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The current threats are well known, and the goals — albeit of an unprecedented magnitude — are already largely mapped. In geostrategic terms, they include: reinforcing European defense against Russia, leading an uneasy transition with America as it moves from indispensable ally to unpredictable partner, and standing up to the rising economic, political, and military power of China. In soft power terms, they include managing the first new wave of enlargement since 2013 and reshaping relations with partners from the Global South, for whom Europe is the natural flag-bearer of a revised multilateralism. To this already overwhelming list could be added the more societal challenges, from AI to climate change and from migration to democracy.

On all these challenges, a credible and ambitious vision is expected by a large number of Europe's partners. Currently lagging in responding to these expectations, Brussels is running the risk of being gradually sidelined. Indeed, it has been conspicuously absent from the tentative negotiations over Ukraine or the current crisis in the Middle East. Hopes of a crucial diplomatic role for Europe have all too often ended in delusion.

These are times to think creatively and promote a narrative that convinces both European populations and outside partners that the EU is profoundly changing. The priority must be to issue a clear political statement about what Europe intends to do at a time when many of its partners have lost confidence in its political agency. This new strategy must be about rebuilding trust in leadership: among the EU's own members, among candidate countries in the Balkans and Eastern Europe, and among all potential partners who seek to build enhanced links with the union. If this future strategy can achieve that goal, it will have provided a meaningful way of reshaping Europe into a more compelling international actor and it will have rekindled true leadership.

The article was first published by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Team Melli must return to 'Queiroz philosophy' against Belgium: Nosrati



By Sadeq Dehqan
Staff writer

INTERVIEW

Former Iran international center-back Mohammad Nosrati believes Team Melli should revert to the defensive blueprint established by former head coach Carlos Queiroz when it faces Belgium in a crucial FIFA World Cup group-stage clash.

Having played to a frustrating 2-2 draw in its Group G opener, Iran will take on Belgium, which also shared the spoils with Egypt in a 1-1 stalemate, at SoFi Stadium in Los Angeles on Sunday.

Speaking to Iran Daily, Nosrati said the defensive structure built during Queiroz's long tenure remains deeply embedded in Iranian football and could prove vital against the European powerhouse. "One encouraging aspect is that the influence of Carlos Queiroz is still visible in Iranian football," Nosrati said. "The impact he had was so significant that you can still see traces of it in the way our players perform. In many ways, this Iranian team resembles the Queiroz era, both in terms of personnel and tactical structure."

According to Nosrati, the Portuguese tactician, who was in charge of the Iranian national team at the previous three World Cups, established a defensive organization that has become ingrained in Iranian football and remains one of the national team's greatest strengths.

"That defensive structure can help us in difficult matches, especially against Belgium," he said. "I expect Iran to adopt a more defensive approach, close down the opponent's routes to goal, and



Iranian players celebrate their first goal during a 2-2 draw against New Zealand in a FIFA World Cup Group G match at SoFi Stadium in Los Angeles, California, on June 15, 2026.

● MATTHEW CHILDS/REUTERS

look to hurt them through counterattacks, pacey players, and set pieces.

"Every player must maintain maximum focus, mark intelligently, and fulfill their defensive responsibilities throughout the game." The former defender acknowledged that Iran's task has become more complicated following the draw against New Zealand, a result he described as a missed opportunity.

"We dropped two very valuable points against New Zealand, points that could have taken us much closer to qualification," Nosrati said. "Belgium has also dropped points, which makes this match even more important and difficult."

"Belgium will dominate possession and control much of the game," he said. "Their style is

completely different from New Zealand's."

Reflecting on Iran's opening match, Nosrati felt the team struggled from the outset, possibly due to inadequate preparation or distractions surrounding the squad. "We started nervously and did not play well early on," he said. "Ironically, after conceding the first goal, the pressure seemed to come off the players. We gained control, found an equalizer, and could even have scored a second goal with better decision-making in attack."

"Our defensive organization was not at its best," he said. "The center-backs and, to some extent, the left-back shared responsibility for the first goal. For the second goal, both the central defenders and goalkeeper Alireza Beiranvand could have reacted better."

He added that Beiranvand may have committed himself too early. "I think he went to ground too quickly. Had he stayed on his feet longer, he might have been able to save the shot."

"New Zealand was relatively unfamiliar to us, but from a technical standpoint, the gap between the two teams was significant enough for Iran to win the match," he said.

Praise for Rezaeian

Nosrati singled out veteran full-back Ramin Rezaeian for special praise after his standout performance, which included a goal and an assist for Mohammad Mohebbi for Iran's second equalizer.

"In my opinion, Ramin Rezaeian should be a role model for other players, especially younger footballers," he said. "Everyone saw how much effort he put in to se-

cure his place at the World Cup." Nosrati highlighted Rezaeian's determination after losing his place at Esteghlal, his move to Foolad Khuzestan midway through the Iranian top-flight season, and his strong performances that earned him a national-team recall.

"He worked tirelessly to keep his World Cup dream alive. He excelled at Foolad, returned to the national team, performed well in the friendlies, scored against Gambia, and was outstanding in Iran's opening World Cup match, where he deservedly earned Man of the Match honors."

By contrast, Nosrati felt several attacking players failed to meet expectations.

"Mehdi Taremi and Saman Qodoudos did not produce the level of performance many expected from them," he said. "Some peo-

ple point to the difficult circumstances back home as a factor, but if that were the case, why was Rezaeian able to perform so well?" Nosrati also questioned the limited playing time given to Amirhossein Hosseinzadeh, who impressed after coming off the bench.

"Considering the excellent two seasons he has had in the Iranian league and the AFC Champions League, I expected him to get more minutes," he said. "Even in a short appearance, he performed well." While Mohebbi scored, Nosrati felt the winger was below his usual standards, particularly in the first half, while Mehdi Qayedi also failed to make the expected impact after entering the game as a substitute.

Despite the setback against New Zealand, Nosrati has not given up hope of seeing Iran progress from the group.

"Losing those two points has made our path much more difficult because we now face two strong teams in Belgium and Egypt," he said.

"If we had won the opening match, I would have been confident of qualification, especially with eight third-placed teams also advancing. But football is unpredictable. We have seen teams produce surprises against stronger opponents in this tournament. "With hard work, concentration, and discipline, Iran can still earn points and even victories against Belgium and Egypt."

Asian Karate Championships:

Iran bags double bronze on Day 2, Nemati into final in men's kumite

Sports Desk

The second day of the AKF Asian Karate Championships in Bali, Indonesia, saw Iranians collect two bronze medals in the women's competition on Friday, while Morteza Nemati secured a place in the men's kumite -75kg final.

Nemati, a silver medalist in Tashkent last year, began his campaign with a 12-2 victory over Uzbekistan's Mamayusuf Mukimjonov before defeating Kuwait's Omar Al-Jenaie 8-3 to advance to the semifinals.

The Iranian then outclassed Japan's Sakiyama Yusei 9-2 to set up a final showdown with defending champion Nurkanat Azhikanov on Sunday. Nemati will be looking to make amends for last year's defeat against the Kazakhstani karateka, who is chasing a third title in four continental championships.

In the women's kumite contests, Iran's Mehrnegar Ahmadi bounced back from a 4-0 loss to last year's bronze medalist, Sarara Shimada of Japan, to defeat Vietnam's Nguyen Thi Man 6-1 and claim a consolation bronze in the -61kg class. She shared the third podium place with China's Gong Li. Elsewhere in the kumite com-



petitions, Hadi Kiani suffered an early exit in the men's -67kg division after back-to-back defeats to Kazakhstan's Olzhas Altynbek (3-1) and Kyrgyzstan's Erlan Akylbek Uulu (3-0).

Masoumeh Mohsenian, meanwhile, was unlucky to miss out on bronze in the women's -55kg class after a 3-0 loss to Vietnam's Hoang Thi My Tam in the third-place bout.

In the kata contests, the Iranian trio of Fatemeh Sadeqi, Sepideh Amini, and Zeinab Hosseini settled for bronze in the women's team event, recovering from a 7-0 defeat to Japan in the semi-



Iran's Morteza Nemati (red) advanced to the men's kumite -75kg final at the Asian Karate Championships in Bali, Indonesia.

● IKF

finals to beat Hong Kong 5-2 in the third-place playoff. It was Sadeqi's second bronze medal in Bali after she had defeated China's Tao Yiwei 6-1 to secure a joint third-place finish alongside the Philippines' Sakura Alforte in the women's individual kata on the opening day – the Iranian's fifth bronze medal in the history of the competition.

The Iranian team of Mahdi Shahin, Matin Farimand, Mobin Jabbari, and Sahand Eslami, meanwhile, saw their men's kata campaign end in the first round following a 5-2 defeat to Chinese Taipei.

Friday's results came after Ali Zand had opened Iran's account with a bronze medal in the men's individual kata on the previous day, courtesy of a 7-0 victory over China's Zheng Qianqu.

The opening day of the kumite competitions, however, was one to forget for the Iranians, as both contestants finished empty-handed in their respective categories.

In the men's -55kg division, Behnam Dehqanzadeh, the 2023 Asian champion, fell to an 8-3 semifinal defeat against reigning champion Zholaman Bigabyl of Kazakhstan before losing 3-2 to Thailand's Natthakrit Ingloy in the bronze-medal bout.

The biggest upset of the day for Iran came in the women's -50kg category, where Sara Bahmanyar – a two-time world bronze medalist and gold medalist at the 2025 World Games – suffered a shock 3-1 loss to Indonesia's Gusti Rahadian and crashed out in the second round.

Sitting Volleyball World Ch'ships:

LA 2028 spots on offer as Iran men, women learn draw

Sports Desk

Iran's men's and women's teams will be chasing qualification spots for the LA 2028 Paralympics when they begin their campaigns at the upcoming Sitting Volleyball World Championships, which start on July 10 in Hangzhou, China.

The draw for the 14th edition of the global showpiece took place this week, with 16 teams divided into four groups in both the men's and women's tournaments.

Reigning world and Paralympic champion Iran will be the clear favorite in the men's competition, beginning its bid for a record-extending ninth title against Poland in Pool D. A second-day clash between familiar foes Iran and Bosnia & Herzegovina will bring together the finalists from both the Paris 2024 Paralympics and the previous World Championships in 2022.

Iran will conclude the group stage against Japan on July 12.

In the other men's groups, host China has been pitted

against two-time silver medalist Germany, Canada, and Thailand in Pool A, while Egypt, the United States, Ukraine, and Rwanda make up Pool B.

Brazil, bronze medalist at the previous two editions, is joined by Kazakhstan, Croatia, and Iraq in Pool C.

In the women's competition, Iran will open its Pool A campaign against Rwanda on the opening day before taking on Kenya and China – the silver medalist at Paris 2024 – on the following days, respectively.

Paralympic champion United States, Germany, Ukraine, and the Netherlands are in Pool B, while Paralympic bronze medalist Canada, Slovenia, Japan, and Hungary will battle for knockout-stage places in Pool C.

Brazil will begin its title defense in Pool D against European champion Italy, France, and Thailand.

The men's and women's champions in Hangzhou will secure their places at the Paralympic Games in Los Angeles in 2028.

Achaemenid remains among latest finds at Hegmataneh

Iranica Desk

Iranian archaeologists have discovered an Achaemenid column base, remains of water management systems, and architectural structures from the Qajar and early Pahlavi periods during excavations at Hegmataneh in Hamadan Province.

According to ISNA, Yaqub Mohammadifar, professor of archaeology at Bu-Ali Sina University and director of the 25th season of excavations at the Hegmataneh World Heritage Site, said that a series of geophysical studies and mapping operations were carried out alongside the latest archaeological excavations to identify buried structures and complete

research data on the historic site.

Referring to the discoveries made during the first two weeks of the current excavation season, Mohammadifar said that the findings so far include an Achaemenid column base, water conveyance structures dating back to the Middle Islamic centuries, and architectural remains from the Qajar period and the early Pahlavi era.

New excavation trenches have been opened in different sections of the site to examine the results of geophysical surveys and improve understanding of the settlement's architectural layout.

He added that trenches have been excavated along

one of the studied axes and near an area where evidence of architectural structures had previously been identified. Additional trenches were also opened in the southeastern section of the site to evaluate geophysical survey data and determine the nature of the recorded anomalies.

Mohammadifar explained that these trenches were positioned according to standard dimensions and based on the excavation grid established for the site. Their locations were selected based on the results of geophysical studies, with the aim of uncovering buried architectural evidence.

"Alongside the progress of the excavation work, detailed documentation

of layers and findings is being carried out through mapping and the recording of spatial data. Preliminary results indicate the high potential of these areas for identifying architectural remains and completing information about the spatial organization of the ancient city under study," he said.

He added that the results of these studies could contribute to a better understanding of the spatial organization of the ancient city of Hegmataneh, the arrangement of historical architectural structures, and the reconstruction of the ancient appearance of this valuable site.

Mohammadifar continued that excavation opera-



ISNA

tions and supplementary investigations in the 25th season are still underway. He said further discoveries are expected to provide

new information about the history and structure of this ancient city, while expanded studies may reveal additional data about

the physical structure, spatial organization, and historical development of the Hegmataneh World Heritage Site.

Six newly discovered inscriptions identified at Teymareh

Iranica Desk

Six newly discovered rock inscriptions written in the Pahlavi script have been identified at the valuable Teymareh rock art complex in Golpayegan, Isfahan Province, researchers have announced.

Mohsen Jamali, a Ph.D. student in archaeology and a researcher specializing in Iran's rock art, said the inscriptions were discovered following nearly two decades of field studies at Golpayegan's rock art sites. The six newly found inscriptions have been introduced, deciphered, and analyzed for the first time in a scientific study, according to chn.ir. Jamali described the Teymareh collection as one of

Iran's richest rock art sites. More than 36,500 rock carvings have so far been identified and documented across 32 locations in Golpayegan. Alongside the rock drawings, historical inscriptions are considered among the most significant remains of the collection, providing valuable information about the language, culture, and lifestyle of people during the late Sasanian period and the early Islamic era.

The researcher noted that nine Pahlavi inscriptions had previously been documented in Golpayegan in the book *Golpayegan Rock Art: A Passage Through History*. However, during recent field investigations, he identified six additional inscriptions that are now being



kojara.com

published for the first time. With these discoveries, the number of known Pahlavi inscriptions at Teymareh in Golpayegan has reached 15. According to Jamali, all of these inscriptions are located near rivers, springs, streams, or seasonal water-

ways. He said that this proximity to water sources provides an important clue for interpreting their meaning. Discussing the findings from the decipherment of the inscriptions, Jamali explained that a common feature among many of them

is the repeated use of the word "Zohab," which in the Pahlavi language refers to a river or flowing water. Two inscriptions also contain the phrase "Zohab-e Mehman," which, based on Pahlavi linguistic sources, may be interpreted as referring to a seasonal, pleasant, and drinkable spring or stream. He added that a combined analysis of the inscriptions, their geographical locations, and the region's water resources suggests that the writings were likely not only memorial markers but also served as signs identifying water sources for travelers, hunters, herders, and nomadic groups. This interpretation is also consistent with the environmental conditions of the area.

Field studies, interviews with elderly residents of nearby villages, and research into local water-related terminology indicate that the importance of water resources has remained a continuous element of the region's local culture from ancient times to the present, Jamali said. He also noted that some village names in Golpayegan include the Persian word for water, while local historical accounts and legends related to Tang-e Gharghab and areas where water collects show meaningful connections with the content of these inscriptions.

Jamali said that most of the inscriptions were written in the cursive Pahlavi script. He emphasized that the

works hold considerable linguistic and archaeological value and could provide new insights into the spread of the Pahlavi language and script, the relationship between humans and the natural environment, and the role of water in the lives of people during the late Sasanian period.

He concluded that the existence of 15 Pahlavi inscriptions within the Golpayegan rock art complex highlights the exceptional importance of the region for historical and archaeological studies in Iran. These remains represent part of the country's cultural heritage, and their preservation, documentation, and continued specialist research are essential.

Martian Mountains offer surreal landscape in Chabahar

Iranica Desk

When the name Mars comes up, many people imagine images sent back by NASA missions — a dry, lifeless world marked by strange ridges and rugged terrain. Yet one does not need to travel millions of kilometers to witness a Martian-like landscape.

In southeastern Iran, between Chabahar and Gwatar, lies a remarkable mountain range known as the "Martian Mountains" or "Miniature Mountains." For years, this natural formation has been regarded as one of the country's most unusual geological attractions, Mehr News Agency wrote.

Located around 40 to 50 kilometers east of Chabahar along the coastal road to Gwatar, the mountains present a striking scene for travelers. On one side of the road lies the Sea of Oman, while on the other rise gray and white cliffs that appear as if carved with a blade and ruler. Deep grooves, sharp ridges, and a complete absence of vegetation create a



landscape rarely seen elsewhere in Iran.

Geologists believe that much of this formation originated from ancient marine sediments. Over millions of years, remnants of marine life, limestone deposits, sand, and clay accumulated in the region and were later shaped by wind and rain erosion into their present form. Even today, traces of prehistoric marine life can still be found in parts of these formations.

These characteristics have led experts to classify the area as a type of "badlands" terrain — a form of heavily

eroded landscape found in only a few regions around the world and known for its unusual appearance that attracts both scientists and tourists.

Similar landscapes can be found in countries such as the United States — particularly in the Badlands of South Dakota — as well as in parts of Chile, Australia, and Spain. However, what distinguishes the Martian Mountains of Chabahar is their unique proximity to the sea.

Unlike most examples worldwide, which are typically located in deserts or

arid inland regions, visitors in Chabahar can simultaneously view Martian-like mountains and the blue expanse of the Sea of Oman. This rare contrast between mountain and ocean is considered one of the region's key tourism advantages.

For many travelers, the appeal of the Martian Mountains is not limited to the destination itself, but also includes the journey. The Chabahar-Gwatar coastal road offers a scenic experience, bordered by the Sea of Oman on one side and miniature mountain ranges on the other. Together with attractions such as the pink Lipar Lagoon, mangrove forests, and Gwatar Bay, the route forms one of Iran's most stunning nature corridors.

In many countries, such scenic routes are developed as dedicated tourism highways, generating significant revenue. Experts believe the Chabahar-Gwatar corridor has the potential to become one of the Middle East's most prominent tourist routes.

The tourism potential of the region has also been



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acknowledged by officials. Former Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Ezzatollah Zarghami described the Martian Mountains and the Makran coast as areas with "very high ecotourism potential," emphasizing the need for infrastructure development and tourism investment.

He noted that the Makran coast and the Martian Mountains could become among the country's most important tourist destinations in the future.

Local tourism authorities report that the Makran coast

currently hosts more than one million tourists annually, with further development of accommodation, recreational, and service infrastructure expected to significantly increase this number.

Iran's tourism industry has long been centered on well-known destinations such as the northern provinces, Isfahan, Shiraz, and Mashhad. However, a new generation of travelers is increasingly seeking different experiences — destinations that offer a sense of discovery, visual appeal for social media, and a close connection to untouched nature.

The Martian Mountains fit precisely into this emerging demand. The region appeals not only to nature lovers and photographers but also to adventure tourists, geology enthusiasts, and content creators. Many images taken here are often mistaken for photographs of Mars rather than a location on Earth.

While many countries invest billions of dollars in artificial attractions, nature in southern Iran has freely offered one of its most extraordinary landscapes. Yet the Martian Mountains still remain far from reaching their full tourism potential. If infrastructure development, media promotion, and tourism investment in the Makran coast are pursued seriously, Chabahar's Martian Mountains could soon stand alongside the region's most iconic natural attractions — a place where visitors can begin their day among Mars-like hills and end it by the ocean waters of the Sea of Oman, experiencing a journey rarely matched anywhere in Iran or the world.

Iran targets tourism brand rebuild in postwar recovery plan



Iran's Deputy Tourism Minister Anoushiravan Mohseni-Bandpey (9th L) attends a strategic tourism meeting in the central city of Yazd on June 18, 2026. ● CHTN

Arts & Culture Desk
Iran plans to rebuild its national tourism brand, expand investment opportunities and diversify tourism products as part of a

broader postwar recovery strategy, Deputy Tourism Minister Anoushiravan Mohseni-Bandpey said during a strategic tourism meeting in the central city of Yazd on Thursday.

Mohseni-Bandpey said the government views tourism as a development-driven and job-creating sector capable of drawing on Iran's vast cultural and civilizational assets to strengthen its

position in regional and international markets, IRNA reported. "Rebuilding and upgrading Iran's national tourism brand in international markets will be one of the central priorities of the new period," he said, adding that tourism diplomacy, international engagement, investment facilitation and stronger private-sector participation would also remain at the forefront of government policy. Speaking at a meeting of the Strategic Council for Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, Mohseni-Bandpey said Iran's tourism industry had

demonstrated significant resilience despite challenges arising from recent wartime conditions and related restrictions. "The tourism sector has shown a strong capacity for recovery, reconstruction and a return to the path of growth," he said. He called for a comprehensive roadmap for the postwar period, saying Iran must diversify its tourism offerings, strengthen marketing and promotional efforts and design products tailored to the evolving expectations of domestic and international travelers. According to the deputy minister, more than 1,000 experts, academics and industry professionals participate in the ministry's strategic council network, contributing to policymaking and practical solutions across the cultural heritage, tourism

and handicrafts sectors. Mohseni-Bandpey highlighted Yazd as a model for tourism investment, crediting provincial authorities and the private sector with creating favorable conditions for capital inflows and infrastructure development. He said the province has expanded projects ranging from heritage restoration and rehabilitation to five-star hotels, tourism complexes and eco-lodges. A UNESCO-listed city renowned for its earthen architecture, windcatchers and historic urban fabric, Yazd is widely regarded as one of Iran's premier cultural tourism destinations. Officials say its combination of heritage assets, desert tourism, wellness experiences and local cuisine positions the province to play a key role in the country's tourism-driven economic recovery.

Five-year revival effort rescues 66 fading handicraft traditions



Arts & Culture Desk
Iran has revived 66 traditional handicraft disciplines that were at risk of disappearing over the past five years, a senior cultural heritage official said, stressing efforts to preserve the country's artisanal legacy while supporting more than 623,000 craftspeople nationwide. Behrouz Nedaei, acting head of the Handicrafts Department at the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, told IRNA that the endangered crafts were restored between 2021 and 2025 through targeted support programs designed to rescue artistic traditions facing extinction due to dwindling numbers of practitioners and structural challenges. Among the crafts revived in 2025 were traditional Givah shoemaking in Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari Province, metalworking in North Khorasan, Pelas weaving in Sistan and Baluchestan, Turkmen traditional footwear in Golestan, Orosi wooden lattice-window making in Lorestan, and traditional dyeing techniques in Hamedan. "Many of these artistic treasures were on the verge of being forgotten," Nedaei said. "Our priority is to ensure they return to active production and remain part of the country's living heritage." He said the ministry identifies endangered crafts annually and channels training and financial support toward their revival, relying heavily on the traditional master-apprentice model to transfer indigenous knowledge to younger generations. Iran's handicrafts sector currently employs more than 623,000 artists, including about 508,000 women, highlighting the industry's role as a major source of cultural and economic activity. Nedaei said licensed activities cover 299 handicraft fields, representing roughly 80% of the country's active craft disciplines. He added that Iranian handicraft production is increasingly shifting toward practical and market-oriented goods, with an estimated 60% to 70% of products now combining artistic value with everyday use, a trend expected to strengthen both domestic sales and export potential.

Jalil Shahnaz, sonority that never returned

By Ali Reza Sepahvand
Journalist

In the history of Persian music, few artists are remembered not merely as performers but as artistic schools unto themselves. Master Jalil Shahnaz was one of those rare figures, an artist whom many scholars and musicians consider him the greatest tar virtuoso of the last century. His stature was not simply the result of technical mastery or command of the radif; rather, it stemmed from a unique combination of profound musical knowledge, extraordinary improvisational genius, a deep understanding of Persian vocal traditions, and an unparalleled ability to shape sound, or what musicians call sonority. Born into a musical family in Isfahan, Shahnaz grew up in an environment where music was an integral part of daily life. He was influenced by the Isfahan school of tar playing and inherited the legacy of masters such as Abdolhossein Shahnazi. Yet what later came to be known as the "Shahnaz Style" transcended imitation and evolved into a completely personal artistic language. Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of Shahnaz's artistry was the unique sonic quality of his instrument. Few musicians in Persian music history have been able to extract such a vast palette of tonal colors from the tar. The sound of his instrument was not merely clear and resonant, it possessed a distinct personality. Through subtle variations in plectrum angle, extraordinary right-hand control, masterful use of vibrato, delicate manipulation of string pressure, and a complete command of the instrument's natural resonance, he endowed every note with an individual identity. Many musicians could play a phrase; Shahnaz could make it speak. In essence, he drew from the tar what a great vocalist draws from the human voice. This quality is precisely why musicians often referred to his playing as vocal in character. When Shahnaz performed avaz accompaniment or instrumental responses to a singer, one did not feel that a stringed instrument was merely answering a vocalist. Rather, it seemed



as though two master singers were engaged in a profound musical dialogue. His phrasing possessed breath, pauses, emphasis, ornamentation, and even emotional inflection. This rare ability made his collaborations with Iran's greatest vocalists some of the most enduring treasures of Persian music. Yet perhaps Shahnaz's greatest distinction lay in his improvisational artistry. In Persian classical music, improvisation represents the highest form of creative expression, requiring the performer to remain faithful to the structure of a modal system while simultaneously creating in the moment. Shahnaz elevated this art to extraordinary heights. His improvisations often appeared more coherent and architecturally complete than many fully composed works. Rather than treating the radif as a collection of memorized patterns, he used it as a language through which he could tell new stories. Every performance became a fresh narrative, unfolding organically before the listener. This brilliance is particularly evident in his performances of Abu Ata, one of the principal derivatives of the Dastgah-e Shur. Abu Ata carries an atmosphere of tenderness, introspection, spirituality, and emotional intimacy. Many musicians, when performing this mode, either fall into monotony or become overwhelmed by sentimentality. Shahnaz, however, achieved an extraordinary balance between emotion and

structure. In Abu Ata, he preserved the sweetness and delicacy of the mode while simultaneously employing sophisticated melodic development, subtle rhythmic variation, and dazzling technical passages that left seasoned musicians astonished. The result was music that appealed equally to ordinary listeners and to highly trained specialists. The secret of this achievement lay in his profound understanding of the inner logic of Persian modal music. Shahnaz never used technique for the sake of display. Rapid passages, powerful tremolos, crisp dorab ornaments, wide melodic leaps, and complex embellishments were always subordinated to musical expression. Consequently, the average listener experienced only beauty, elegance, and emotional immediacy, while professional musicians recognized the immense technical complexity hidden beneath that apparent simplicity. From a formal perspective, Shahnaz's improvisations are also remarkable examples of musical architecture. He approached a performance much like a master storyteller. A calm introduction gradually expanded into larger musical ideas, leading toward carefully calculated climaxes, moments of tension and suspense, and ultimately a satisfying resolution. Everything unfolded according to a compelling narrative logic. This is why

even his longest improvisations never become tiresome. Listeners are unconsciously guided through the story he constructs, following its emotional and structural progression from beginning to end. Another significant aspect of Shahnaz's artistry was his ability to revive neglected corners of Persian classical music. Rather than limiting himself to the most frequently performed gushehs, he explored hidden possibilities within each modal system. In doing so, he expanded the expressive horizons of the tar and opened new pathways for future generations of musicians. His influence on Persian music became so profound that even the greatest vocalists acknowledged their debt to his artistry. Mohammad Reza Shajarian, widely regarded as one of Iran's most celebrated singers, frequently spoke with admiration and amazement about Shahnaz's playing. It is often said that Shajarian absorbed many subtleties of vocal phrasing from listening to Shahnaz's tar. Indeed, Shajarian's admiration ran so deep that he later named his ensemble "Shahnaz," a tribute to the immense impact that the master's sound had on his own artistic development. If one were to summarize Jalil Shahnaz's legacy in a single sentence, it would be this: he erased the boundary between instrumental performance and singing. Before Shahnaz, the tar was an instrument. After Shahnaz, the tar became a language, a language capable of weeping, laughing, whispering, narrating, and expressing love. As we commemorate the anniversary of this legendary musician's birth, perhaps the most fitting description is the one repeatedly offered by the great masters of Persian music themselves: Jalil Shahnaz was not merely an outstanding performer; he was the very standard by which beauty in Persian tar playing came to be measured. Even today, whenever discussions arise about tonal beauty and sonority, improvisation, vocal-style phrasing, and expressive elegance, the name Jalil Shahnaz stands as a towering peak in Persian classical music.